

# Danesfort Dispatches

## A Quarterly Newsletter from the U.S. Consulate General Belfast

October 2010



Vol. 5, Issue 4

Dear American Community,

I am struggling to admit that summer is over and fall has arrived, but with the cool weather, darker nights, and all the students in uniform walking to school in the morning self-deception is difficult. The Consulate team is already into a busy fall season. Last week, we supported former President Bill Clinton's visit to Derry/L'Derry after an absence of fifteen years. He met with First Minister Peter Robinson and Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness and then held a roundtable discussion with members of Northern Ireland working group and prominent business figures from the Northwest and Derry city. He also spoke to an audience of over two hundred political, civic, and business leaders as well as UU/Magee students (and via digital video link-up to students in Belfast.) President Clinton, who was accompanied by U.S. economic envoy Declan Kelly, focused on employment and economic development in Northern Ireland. The visit comes after his hosting of a Northern Ireland panel at last September's Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) in New York and just before Secretary Hillary Clinton hosts U.S.-NI economic conference in Washington, D.C. on October 19, 2010.

This past weekend, it was great to watch the Boston Bruins versus the Belfast Giants exhibition game at the Odyssey Arena. The game was the first time that the Bruins had played in Europe and for the Odyssey it was an event to celebrate its 10th anniversary. The Giants held their own for the first two quarters and scored the first goal, but in the end the Bruins won 5-1. This is but one example of the strong and growing cultural links between Northern Ireland and the United States. Of course, I am counting Graeme McDowell as one of our "links" since he's from Portstewart but also calls the U.S. home!

Best regards,

Kamala Lakhdhir  
Consul General

### Absentee Voting

The Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) and the Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act (MOVE) grant U.S. citizens overseas the right to vote in federal elections in the United States. Federal elections include primaries as well as general and special elections for the President, Vice President, U.S. Senators, and U.S. Representatives to Congress. The UOCAVA applies only to federal elections. However, many states have enacted legislation whereby certain categories of citizens residing overseas can vote by absentee ballot for state or local officials. The same procedures for obtaining ballots are used for both local and federal elections.

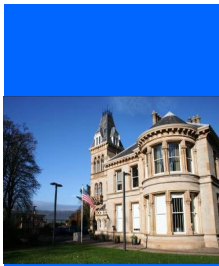
The general election on November 2nd is only a month away. Be sure to request your absentee ballot and make your vote count.

For more information visit the Federal Voters Assistance Program website at

<http://www.fvap.gov>.

#### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Students Overseas	2
Spotlight: IPCA	3
DV Lottery -	4
ACS FAQ's	4
2012 Diversity Visa Program	5
Culture Corner	6
Kids Corner	7



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## Tips for Overseas Students

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Studying abroad can be a fun and safe experience but it is important to realize that you are subject to the laws and customs of another country. Here are some tips prepared by the Office of Overseas Services to help keep you prepared and safe.

Although most trips abroad are trouble free, being prepared will go a long way to avoiding the possibility of serious trouble.

Become familiar with the basic laws and customs of the country you plan to visit before you travel.

Remember: Reckless behavior while in another country can do more than ruin your vacation; it can land you in a foreign jail or worse! To have a safe trip, avoid risky behavior and plan ahead.

Some helpful websites offered by the U.S. Government are:

<http://travel.state.gov> - U.S. State Department

<http://www.studentsabroad.state.gov> – Students Abroad

## Passport Validity: Know Before You Go

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### Check Your Passport's Validity -

Many countries now require that your passport be valid for at least 6 months as a condition for entry. We recommend that you check with <http://www.travel.state.gov> for this and other entry requirements well ahead of any planned travel. If you do need to renew your passport, please plan on approximately ten working days from the date of application receipt to receipt of the new passport.

More passport renewal information at the U.S. Consulate Belfast, go to <http://www.usembassy.org.uk/nireland/nipass.html>

### Need More Passport Pages?

If your full-validity U.S. passport has not expired yet, but has no blank pages left, we can add additional pages. For further information see <http://london.usembassy.gov/nireland/nipass.html>.

## Electronic System of Travel Authorization (ESTA) Fee

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Since January 12, 2009, citizens of the United Kingdom and Ireland (as well as 30 other countries) have been required to obtain travel authorization through the Department of Homeland Security's online Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA) prior to initiating travel to the United States for tourism or business under the VWP.

On September 8, 2010 the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) implemented a \$14 ESTA fee.

If you have friends, family members, neighbors, or colleagues, who hold a British or Irish passport or a passport from one of the other 30 VWP countries, and who may be traveling to the U.S., please let them know about this new requirement.

For more information and to register with ESTA, go to <http://london.usembassy.gov>, see the ESTA box on the right hand side of the screen.



# Spotlight : International Parental Child Abduction (IPCA) and the Hague Convention

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## **What is the State Department's position on International Parental Child Abduction?**

The Department of State has no higher priority than the welfare of U.S. citizens overseas. This is particularly true for our smallest citizens, who cannot speak for themselves. Assisting the victims of international parental child abduction has long been an important activity of the Bureau of Consular Affairs. In 1994, the Office of Children's Issues (CI) was created. The abduction unit of this office is devoted to working with parents to resolve the cases of their abducted children.

The United States is party to the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. The Hague Convention is a civil legal mechanism available to parents seeking the return of, or access to, their child. Its focus is prompt return of children to their homes for adjudication of custody. The State Department views the Hague Convention as a template of how to proceed in an International Parental Child Abduction case, despite the fact that some countries cannot or will not participate in the Hague process (the United Kingdom is party to the Hague Convention).

## **How can the Hague Convention help?**

The countries that are party to the Convention have agreed that a child who is habitually resident in one party country, and who has been removed to or retained in another party country in violation of the left-behind parent's custodial rights, shall be promptly returned to the country of habitual residence for a custody hearing. Habitual residence is usually determined by the country in which a child was residing and is considered to have been settled prior to his/her removal. The Convention can also help parents seek visitation rights abroad. The treaty obligates a member to return an abducted child below the age of 16 if application is made within one year from the date of the wrongful removal or retention, unless one of the exceptions to return apply. If the application for return is made after one year, the court may use its discretion to decide that the child has become resettled in his or her new country and refuse return of the child. Although CI's obligation to assist under the Convention may end at age 16, our interest in international parental child abduction cases continues until the child's 18th birthday. Even after the child turns 18, the Office of American Citizens Services will continue to take all possible steps to assure the well-being of the now-adult U.S. citizens, until he or she informs us that no further assistance is required.

## **What does the Office of Children's Issues do?**

When a U. S. citizen child is abducted abroad, the State Department's Office of Children's Issues (CA/OCS/CI) works with U. S. embassies and consulates abroad, state and Federal agencies, and –most importantly—the left behind parent. We help the child and parent in a number of ways and make every effort to ensure that the child returns to his or her place of habitual residence using available, lawful means. Consular officers overseas are dedicated to responding to the best of their ability, within the procedures and laws available, to requests for assistance by U.S. citizens.

## **What resources or literature are available to left-behind parents?**

The Bureau of Consular Affairs website [http://travel.state.gov/family/abduction/abduction\\_580.html](http://travel.state.gov/family/abduction/abduction_580.html) provides general information on International Parental Child Abduction. On the site, we also have country-specific flyers on this topic. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children website at [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com) also provides extensive information.

U.S. Department of State Office of Children's Issues - [http://travel.state.gov/familyfamily\\_1732.html](http://travel.state.gov/familyfamily_1732.html)

U.S. Department of State Office of Children's Issues - Prevention Suggestions - [http://travel.state.gov/family/abduction/prevention/prevention\\_560.html](http://travel.state.gov/family/abduction/prevention/prevention_560.html).

## **Other Resources**

The UK charity REUNITE specializes in international parental child abduction. Their website, <http://www.reunite.org>, offers advice, information and checklists.

## American Citizen Services—FAQ's



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**Q: Is it true that anyone born in the United States is a U.S. citizen?**

A: Yes, almost anybody born in the United States is an American citizen regardless of the nationality or status of his/her parents. The only exception is for children of foreign diplomats who have full diplomatic immunity. Anyone else can apply for an American passport by presenting an original birth certificate showing birth in the United States and adequate identity documents.

**Q. Can I hold more than one passport or nationality?**

A. Yes. In the 1980's, the Supreme Court ruled that citizenship is a constitutional right that cannot be taken away from a citizen who does not intend to relinquish it. Therefore, such actions as naturalization in a foreign country, employment with a foreign government, and/or voting in a foreign election do not automatically jeopardize American citizenship. However, please note that all U.S. citizens, even dual nationals, must enter and depart the United States on U.S. passports.

The State Department [Advice about Possible Loss of U.S. Citizenship and Dual Nationality](#) has further details.



**Q. I am an American citizen, but also have a foreign passport. Can I use my foreign passport to travel to the United States?**

A: No. Under U.S. law, U.S. citizens must be in possession of a valid U.S. passport to enter or leave the United States. This is true even if you hold a passport from another country. If your U.S. passport has been lost or stolen, or if it has expired, you must apply to replace it before traveling to the United States.

## Ulster American Women's Club Luncheon



The Ulster American Woman's Club would like to invite American woman in Northern Ireland to a potluck luncheon on Wednesday, October 20, 2010. It will take place from 11:00 am to 2:00 pm. For more information and location contact the local organizer of the Ulster American Women's Club at 07789 373130.

## Registering with the U.S. Consulate General Belfast

Over the last few months, many of you have been contacted by our office in relation to updating our records of American citizens registered as residents of or temporary visitors to Northern Ireland.

For those who may not have been contacted but have changed any of your contact information in the last number of years, or who know of other American citizens residing in Northern Ireland and have not registered with the Consulate, visit <https://travelregistration.state.gov/ibrs/ui/> to register.

Be sure to include an email address as this is our primary method of contact.

Once registered, you will receive our quarterly newsletters, any important travel information and news or events that we think U.S. citizens may be interested in.

We also have a Facebook Page you may want to visit. Click on the link below!



Find us on [Facebook](#)

## 2012 Diversity Visa (DV Lottery) Program

The Diversity Lottery program is an annual lottery run by the U.S. Department of State. The DV Lottery offers up to 50,000 permanent resident visas each year to randomly selected eligible applicants from eligible countries.

To enter the DV lottery, entrants must:

(1) be a "native" of one of a list of specified countries. The list includes Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

"Native", in most cases means the country in which the entrant was born. However, there are two other ways to qualify. First, if the entrant was born in a country whose natives are ineligible but the entrant's spouse was born in a country whose natives are eligible, the entrant can claim the spouse's country of birth—provided that both the entrant and their spouse are on the selected entry, are issued visas, and enter the United States simultaneously. Second, if the entrant was born in a country whose natives are ineligible, but neither of the entrant's parents was born there or resided there at the time of the entrant's birth, the entrant may claim nativity in one of the parents' countries of birth if it is a country whose natives qualify for the DV-2012 program.

and,

(2) meet either the education or work experience requirement of the DV program.

To meet the education requirement, entrants must have either a high school education or its equivalent. To meet the work experience requirement, entrants must have at least two years of work experience within the past five years in a qualifying occupation.

Those who do not meet these requirements should NOT submit an entry to the DV program. For further information about eligibility criteria, go to [http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants/types/types\\_1318.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/immigrants/types/types_1318.html).

The online registration for DV-2012 DV Lottery begins at noon (EDT) on Tuesday, October 5, 2010, and ends at noon (EST) on Wednesday, November 3, 2010. All entries must be submitted electronically during the registration period, when applicants may access the Electronic DV Entry Form DS-5501 online. Paper entries will not be accepted. Entry is free of charge at <http://www.dvlottery.state.gov>. Applicants are strongly encouraged not to wait until the last week of the registration period to enter. Heavy demand may result in website delays.

Entrants will need to keep a record of their entry confirmation number to determine whether their application has been successful or not via the Entry Status Check which will be available at [www.dvlottery.state.gov](http://www.dvlottery.state.gov) from May 1, 2011. Entry Status Check will be the sole means by which DV-2012 entrants are notified of their selection, provided instructions on how to proceed with their application, and notified of their immigrant visa interview appointment date and time. Selectees will not be notified by letter or email. Entrants who lose their entry confirmation number will not be able to check their DV entry status and the confirmation page cannot be resent.

**Please Note:** The U.S. Government employs no outside consultants or private services to operate the program. Any intermediaries or others who offer assistance to prepare an application do so without the authority or consent of the U.S. Government. Use of any outside intermediary or assistance to prepare a DV entry is entirely at the applicant's discretion, but the U.S. Government stresses that selection is entirely random and that independent organizations, including law offices, claiming to offer visa assistance cannot improve an applicant's chances for selection. A qualified entry submitted electronically directly by an applicant has an equal chance of being selected as does an entry submitted electronically through a paid intermediary who completes the entry for the applicant.

**Fraud Warning:** There have been instances of fraudulent websites posing as official U.S. Government sites. Some companies posing as the U.S. Government have sought money in order to "complete" lottery entry forms. There is no charge to download and complete the Electronic Diversity Visa Entry Form from the official U.S. government website <http://www.dvlottery.state.gov>.

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## Culture Corner

The U.S. Consulate General occasionally provides partial grants for cultural events which have an American element. Some of the events are free, for others there is a charge. This quarter, we encourage you to check out:

**Belfast Festival at Queens** - October 15 - 30, 2010 - All the best in movies, music and comedy come to Belfast for this stellar event. Find out more details and ticket information at <http://www.belfastfestival.com>

**20th Annual Cinemagic Belfast** - November 11 - 26, 2010 - Cinemagic is an award-winning organization that uses the magic of film and all forms of moving images to entertain, educate, motivate and inspire young people. The festival programme includes an array of preview screenings, workshops for schools, special film events and more. Visit <http://www.cinemagic.org.uk> for more details.

**Halloween Celebrations** - (various venues) - visit National Museums Northern Ireland website for some of the festivities going on around Northern Ireland in late October. Go to <http://www.nmni.com/Home/What-s-on> for more information.

**Disclaimer:** This listing of events, performances and other activities is for information purposes only and does not constitute an endorsement by the U.S. Consulate General Belfast. All opinions expressed by the artists, writers, and performers participating or contributing to the events listed are those solely of the participants and contributors and not the U.S. Government or its designated representatives. Listing information is believed to be correct at the time it is listed but the U.S. Consulate General accepts no liability for subsequent changes to these details and no reliance should be placed upon them.

**American Citizen Services:** In the event of a genuine emergency involving a U.S. Citizen in Northern Ireland, our after-hours phone number is 07545 507738.

## Consular Closure Dates

The U.S. Consulate General Belfast will be closed on the following dates:

Monday, October 11, 2010 - Columbus Day  
Thursday, November 11, 2010 - Veteran's Day  
Thursday, November 25, 2010 - Thanksgiving Day  
Friday, December 24, 2010 - Christmas Day  
Monday, December 27, 2010 - Christmas Day  
Tuesday, December 28, 2010 - Christmas Day  
Friday, December 31, 2010 - New Year's Day  
Monday, January 3, 2011 - New Year's Day



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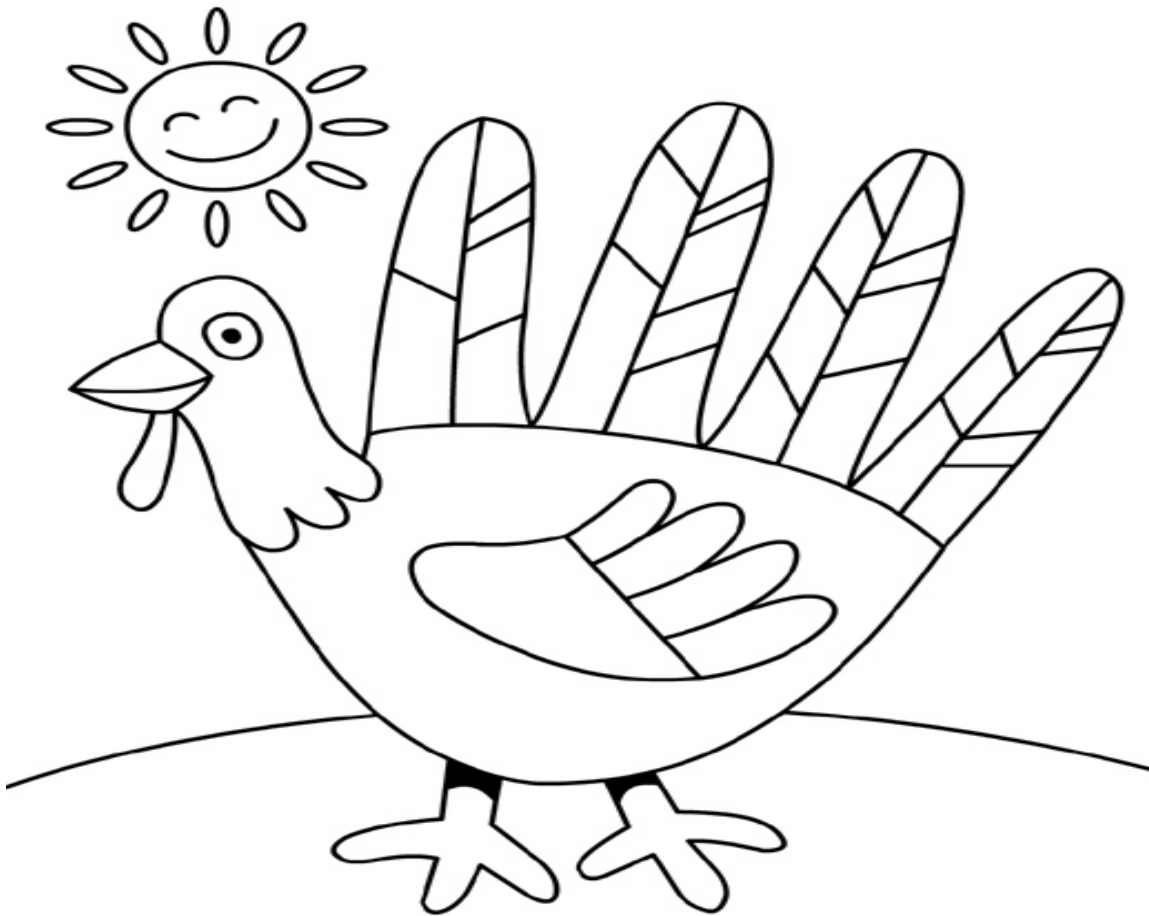
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# KIDS CORNER



## Coloring Fun



COLOR IN THIS THANKSGIVING TURKEY WITH  
LOTS OF COLORFUL FEATHERS!